

Important: Annual Meeting March 17

(details page 4)



Belle Isle News

Newsletter of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

MARCH 1985

PUBLIC INTEREST AND PRIVATE LAND

Our lands are well worn. Not one piece of land in New England has been untouched by man's footsteps. Very little land in this vast country remains pristine, serene and still. All of our country's lands have come to know bulldozers, logging rigs and hiker's boots. When will we begin to cherish and respect this more and more scarce resource? (from "Belle Isle: A Salt Marsh in a City," by Barbara Gard, 1984.)

Volunteers from Friends of Belle Isle Marsh have recently been circulating a petition door-to-door in Winthrop. It is in opposition to Mr. William Zoppo's proposed development at the filled portion of Belle Isle Marsh that he owns just off Revere Street.

The most common response to the petition has been, "I've lived here all my life and really enjoy the small-town atmosphere. There is enough development here in Winthrop. We need to preserve open spaces." This, of course, is virtually our position on the matter.

Another common response has been, "If he owns the property he should be able to do whatever he wants with it." The fact is, towns and municipalities have long regulated the use of land within their jurisdiction through zoning bylaws and planning boards. It is important that we look at projects like this in terms of how they will affect the public interest.

Some History

Many people assume that just because Mr. Zoppo's plans were disapproved last year or the year before that the issue is settled for good.

Unfortunately, such is not the case. Since 1970, each of Mr. Zoppo's proposals for town houses, industrial buildings, high-rise condominiums, or cluster development has been defeated by popular pressure, but the counter pressure from the developer has been steady.

Historical records (and photos in the Winthrop Transcript) show that the edge of the property in question was occupied by several houses that were abandoned and eventually razed. Mr. Zoppo acquired the site of these razed homes and 22 acres of abutting marshland in the middle sixties and proceeded to fill seventeen acres with material that he was contracted to transport off Deer Island. A Winthrop ordinance prohibited the removal of fill from the town. This ordinance was narrowly interpreted to mean that the fill from Deer Island (a part of Boston) could not leave Winthrop once it entered. Therefore, Mr. Zoppo had to fill a likely looking wetland. This was in the days before the Wetland Protection Act prevented such activities.

The stage was thus set for a succession of attempts by Mr. Zoppo and his real estate company, Neponset Associates, to attempt to develop this land.

Now -- and the Future

Mr. Zoppo's current plans call for a development of over 100 duplex units on 17 acres. Due to pressure from the Winthrop Conservation Commission, four to ten of the units, shown to be below the 100-year flood level on the developer's own plans, have been eliminated. Still, the first section of the access road to the entire development will be under two feet of

water during big storms.

There is no doubt that the public will pay for the thoughtlessness of these plans. Those who buy the the properties and the town-people will foot the bill for extra flood-control measures, rescue operations, and emergency evacuations. Federal flood insurance will foot the bill for damage to these dwellings -- and we all pay that bill. As always, everywhere, extra population means higher taxes to cover ordinary services like police, fire, schools, water, sewage.

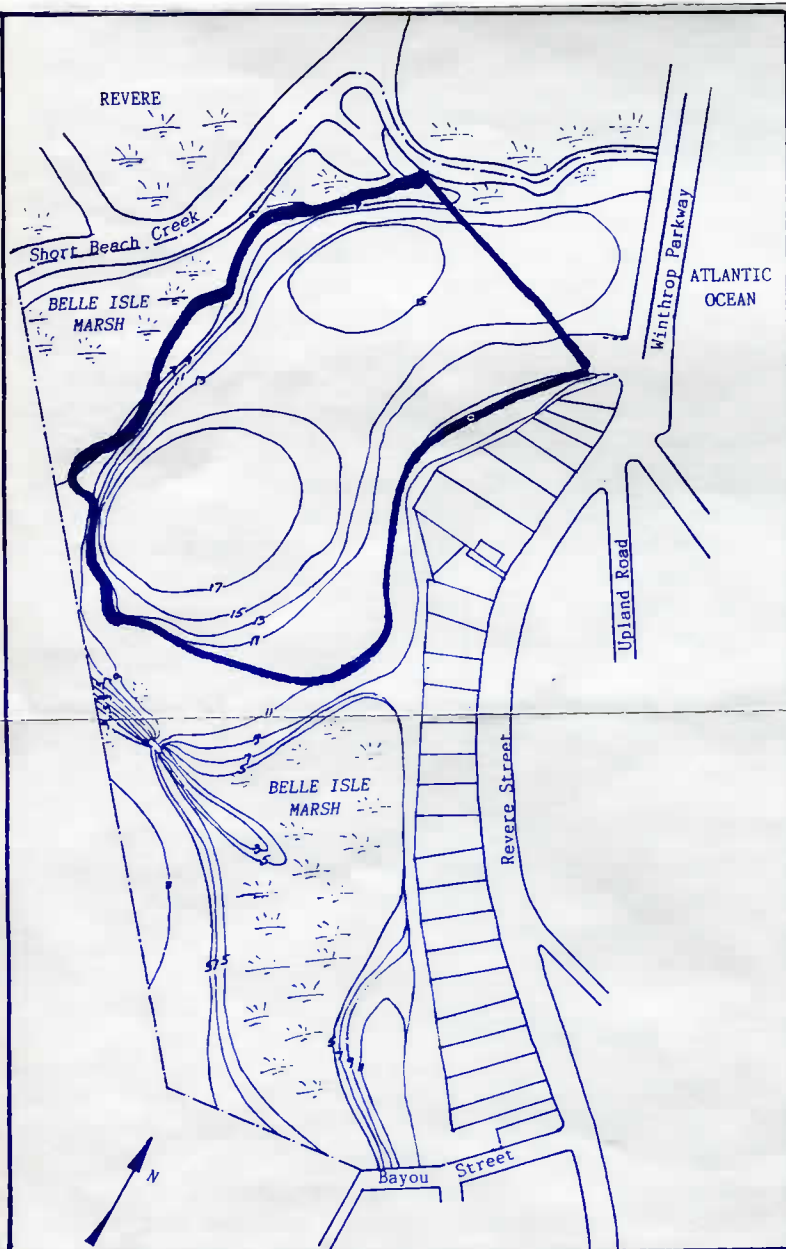
The impact of this development on Belle Isle Marsh, from construction debris to driveway runoff, will be enormous. The development will share a very long border with this active, viable salt-marsh, one of the last large remnants left in the urban landscape.

Meanwhile, Winthrop citizens could be demanding that the land be acquired with public funds and converted into a park for the enjoyment of all. One of the oft-repeated observations made by residents during our door-to-door canvassing was the unsightliness of the filled land next to Revere Street. There is no reason for that problem to continue.

This lands needs husbandry, not development.

Please join our petition drive to stop the Zoppo development by calling the Petition Coordinator, Gail Miller, at 567-5072. In addition, Winthrop residents could help by signing our petition, and letting their views be known to Planning Board and Conservation Commission members.

Soheil Zende



The Zoppo property. Heavy line shows limits of "100 year flood."

A SNAIL'S PACE

A salt-marsh snail* is often striped
And has a clock inside
That tells it when to climb a stalk
And there escape high tide

Because it has no door to close
—No snail operculum
To guard against the tidal surge
Of water soon to come.

Up high it's safe from rising sea
(From birds more safe below).
Thus twice a day it changes worlds,
And yet we think it slow.

Esther Fich

(*Melampus bidentatus*, an air-breathing snail, is found in salt marshes along the entire East Coast.)

* * *

THE PITCH

Printing and mailing this newsletter, as well as all other activities of Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, are financed by membership dues and private donations from generous members. Please be sure you are caught up with your dues by the time of the Annual Meeting, or plan to pay at the door so you can participate in the elections.

Membership dues are as follows: Individual: \$3; Family: \$5; Seniors and under 16: \$1.

JIM FALCK: Serving the Public Interest

Editor's note: On the other side of Belle Isle Inlet from the Zoppo property, another force is "developing" the marsh -- into a park and reservation for the benefit of all. Its architect is Jim Falck, chief park planner and landscape architect for the Metropolitan District Commission. This is the first in a series of portraits of long-time friends of Belle Isle Marsh.

"Another fellow and I came across Belle Isle and wondered why it wasn't in someone's preserve." Jim Falck thus describes the beginning of his personal interest in Belle Isle Marsh, which developed prior to his employment with MDC. Being from the Midwest, Falck explains, may have made him especially appreciative of the open space provided by Belle Isle in the midst of urban congestion.

Once at the MDC, Falck was able to act upon his concern for Belle Isle. He describes the process by which the marsh was acquired as an MDC reservation, constantly emphasizing the support provided by community groups in East Boston and by concerned individuals, among them Ms. Edith DeAngelis of the East Boston Land Use Council, Representative Gus Serra of East Boston, and Senator Francis Doris of Revere.

In the early 1970s the legislature granted two

million dollars to MDC for land acquisition and the development of recreational facilities in East Boston. "Edie DeAngelis and I took a reconnaissance visit through East Boston to see what lands were available," Falck explains. As a result of their trip a number of recommendations were made to the MDC, one of which was to acquire the abandoned drive-in theater at the edge of the marsh to be redeveloped as a park. An agreement was reached with Massport (then the owner), and MDC was granted land rights to about 160 acres of the marsh. Belle Isle Marsh Reservation was officially dedicated in June 1978 (see photo).

Falck then planned and oversaw the landscaping of the reservation. He explains that when a piece of urban land is left to nature, it can look abandoned, too often providing a "poor intellectual excuse" for development.

In the future he hopes to plant trees, create a parking lot, and build a wildlife observation tower. In describing his preference for a look-out tower as opposed to a boardwalk system, Falck emphasizes that the area is a reservation first and foremost. "For animals in the marsh," he says, "privacy is sacred."

Jim Falck's preference, and that of the MDC, is to husband and protect the land to evoke the feeling that Belle Isle Marsh is a special place in the city.

Margarita Drozdoff



Ground-breaking for Belle Isle Park. Jim Falck at far left.

FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

The following field trips have been scheduled to start at 1 PM. Please meet at the entrance to Belle Isle Marsh Reservation on Bennington Street, East Boston. Dress warmly and wear waterproof footwear.

Saturday, March 9
Sunday, March 24

These field trips start at 2 PM:

Sunday, April 14
Saturday, April 27
Sunday, May 5
Saturday, May 11
Sunday, May 19
Saturday, May 25
Sunday, June 2
Saturday, June 15

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We have been invited to visit Bill Nuttle's laboratory at MIT where he pursues his research into the hydrology of Belle Isle Marsh. (See "Plumbing the Depths," Belle Isle News, September 1984.) This "field trip" is scheduled at 2 PM, Saturday, April 20. Please meet at the corner of Vassar and Main Streets, Cambridge.

Field trips are free and open to the public. Please call the following trip leaders for further information.

David Desmond 324-7527
Kermit Norris 567-2339
Soheil Zendehe 628-8990

Please note: We have marked your mailing label with an asterisk after your name if our records indicate that you did not pay your membership dues in 1984. We may have to drop you off the mailing list if we do not receive dues for the current year.

COME TO OUR ANNUAL MEETING

TIME: Sunday, March 17, 2 PM.

PLACE: Our Lady of Lourdes Church Hall,
2 Endicott Avenue, Beachmont (Revere).

We have invited MDC Commissioner William Geary to be our featured speaker. As usual, refreshments will be served to top it all off.

This gathering is free and open to the public.

ANNUAL ELECTIONS

The Nominating Committee recommends the following nominations for the Board of Directors:

President: Gail Miller
Vice President: Craig Jackson
Secretary: Soheil Zendehe
Treasurer: Ann Lindsey

The election will be held at the Annual Meeting, and other nominations will be accepted from the floor.

This newsletter is produced by Pat Hickey and Soheil Zendehe, with assistance from Margarita Drozdoff. Our thanks to Laura Palmer of MDC Public Information for providing the groundbreaking photo.

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